



Role of Skill Development in Achieving Holistic Education under NEP 2020

Rani Maurya

UGC- SRF, Department of B. Ed./M. Ed. (IASE), Faculty of Education & Allied Sciences, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Rohilkhand University, Bareilly –243006 (UP).

Email: rani17maurya@gmail.com

Received: 13 March 2026 | **Accepted:** 21 March 2026 | **Published:** 25 April 2026

Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 marks a transformative shift in the Indian education system by emphasizing holistic, multidisciplinary, and skill-oriented learning. Moving away from rote memorization, the policy envisions an education framework that nurtures cognitive, social, emotional, and vocational competencies among learners. Skill development has been positioned as a central element in achieving the broader goal of holistic education. The present study aims to study the role of skill development in achieving holistic education as envisioned under NEP 2020. It emphasizes on understanding the integration of skills contributes to the overall development of learners. The study adopts a descriptive research methodology, relying on secondary data sources such as policy documents, research articles, and academic reports. A conceptual analysis approach is used to explore the interrelationship between skill development and holistic education. The expected findings suggest that skill development plays a significant role in enhancing critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and self-reliance among students. It also highlights that experiential learning, and multidisciplinary approaches are key drivers in promoting holistic development. However, challenges such as lack of infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and implementation gaps may hinder effective execution. In conclusion, the study underscores that skill development is essential for realizing the vision of holistic education under NEP 2020. It recommends strengthening teacher capacity, curriculum integration, and institutional support to effectively implement skill-based education and prepare learners for the demands of the 21st century.

Keywords: Skill Development, Holistic Education, NEP 2020, 21st Century Skills, Experiential Learning

Introduction

The National Education Policy 2020 is a comprehensive reform initiative introduced by the Government of India to transform the education system in alignment with the demands of the 21st century. It replaces the earlier National Policy on Education (1986) and emphasizes accessibility, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability in education (Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy promotes a multidisciplinary and flexible approach, integrating academic and vocational streams while fostering critical thinking and innovation. One of the key structural changes proposed in NEP 2020 is the 5+3+3+4 curricular framework, which is based on the developmental stages of learners. Additionally, the policy

stresses experiential learning, digital literacy, and continuous assessment to ensure meaningful learning outcomes (Kumar, 2021). By focusing on skill development and holistic growth, NEP 2020 aims to prepare learners for global competitiveness and lifelong learning.

Concept of Holistic Education

Holistic education is a central theme of NEP 2020, aiming at the all-round development of learners. It encompasses cognitive, emotional, social, and physical dimensions, ensuring balanced personality development (Jain, 2021). Unlike traditional education systems that prioritize academic achievement, holistic education emphasizes the development of values, ethics, creativity, and well-being. Cognitive Development: Enhances intellectual abilities such as reasoning and problem-solving. Emotional Development: Builds emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and resilience. Social Development: Encourages teamwork, communication, and social responsibility. Physical Development: Promotes health, fitness, and physical well-being. This multidimensional approach enables students to become responsible citizens and effective contributors to society (UNESCO, 2015).

Need for Skill Development in Modern Education

In the contemporary globalized and technology-driven world, the demand for skilled individuals has increased significantly. Education systems must go beyond theoretical knowledge and equip learners with practical and transferable skills. Skill development is essential for enhancing employability, fostering innovation, and addressing socio-economic challenges (World Bank, 2019).

NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of integrating:

- **21st-century skills** (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication)
- **Life skills** (decision-making, adaptability, emotional intelligence)
- **Vocational skills** (industry-relevant competencies)
- **Digital skills** (ICT literacy and technological proficiency)

The integration of these skills ensures that learners are well-prepared for future challenges and opportunities (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Shift from Rote Learning to Competency-Based Learning

A significant paradigm shift introduced by NEP 2020 is the transition from rote memorization to competency-based learning. The traditional system often emphasized recall of information rather than understanding and application. This approach limited students' creativity and critical thinking abilities. Competency-based education focuses on: Conceptual understanding, Application of knowledge in real-life contexts, Development of practical skills, Continuous and formative assessment. According to (Ministry of Education, 2020), this shift encourages active learning through experiential methods such as projects, internships, and problem-solving activities. It aligns learning outcomes with real-world requirements and promotes deeper engagement among learners. Despite the progressive vision of NEP 2020, the effective implementation of skill development for holistic education remains a major concern. Many educational institutions continue to rely on traditional teaching methods, lacking adequate infrastructure, trained teachers, and resources for skill-based learning (Sharma, 2022). There is also a gap between policy objectives and classroom practices, particularly in rural and under-resourced areas. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the role of skill development in achieving holistic education under NEP 2020 and to identify the challenges and barriers that hinder its effective implementation.

Literature Review on Skill Development, Holistic Education, and NEP 2020 Reforms

Skill Development: Research emphasizes a shift from content-heavy to competency-based and experiential learning. Key findings highlight the importance of early vocational integration (starting from Grade 6) and the development of 21st-century skills (the 4Cs: Creativity, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, and Communication) to bridge the employability gap. **Holistic Education:** Studies focus on multidisciplinary curricula that support "whole-child" development, incorporating socio-emotional learning, psychological well-being, and flexible higher education pathways. **NEP 2020 Reforms:** Current research largely analyzes the policy's potential to transform the Indian education system through flexible entry/exit options and multidisciplinary degrees. However, most work remains descriptive or policy-oriented rather than longitudinal or empirical. The review identifies critical missing elements in existing literature: **Longitudinal Evidence:** A lack of long-term empirical studies tracking the actual impact of NEP reforms on student outcomes. **Infrastructure & Digital Divide:** Insufficient research on how to scale reforms in resource-constrained or digitally disconnected regions. **Teacher Preparedness:** A significant gap in evaluating effective models for training teachers in the new pedagogical approaches. **Industry Alignment:** Limited evidence on the efficacy of specific industry-academia partnership models.

Provisions of NEP 2020 Related to Skill Development

The National Education Policy 2020 places strong emphasis on integrating skill development into the mainstream education system to prepare learners for holistic growth and employability. The policy introduces several key provisions that promote practical learning, competency development, and real-world readiness. **1. Vocational Education from Early Grades** - One of the most significant provisions of NEP 2020 is the introduction of vocational education from the school level, starting as early as Grade 6. The policy aims to remove the social stigma associated with vocational work and promote the dignity of labor (Ministry of Education, 2020). Students are exposed to various vocational skills such as carpentry, gardening, coding, and local crafts. This early exposure helps learners: Develop practical skills alongside academic knowledge, Explore career options at an early stage, Enhance self-reliance and confidence. The policy envisions that by 2025, at least 50% of learners will have exposure to vocational education, thereby bridging the gap between education and employment. **2. Experiential Learning** - NEP 2020 strongly advocates experiential learning, which focuses on "learning by doing." It encourages hands-on activities, project-based learning, inquiry-based approaches, and real-life problem-solving tasks. Experiential learning helps in: Deepening conceptual understanding, Enhancing critical thinking and creativity, Making learning engaging and meaningful. Instead of rote memorization, students actively participate in the learning process, which leads to better retention and application of knowledge (Kolb, 1984). Activities such as experiments, field visits, and collaborative projects are promoted to foster practical learning experiences. **3. Internship Opportunities** - The policy introduces internship opportunities as a crucial component of skill development, especially from middle and secondary school levels. Students are encouraged to engage in internships with local artisans, industries, and community organizations. Internships provide: Real-world exposure and work experience, Understanding of workplace ethics and responsibilities, Opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings. This provision helps students connect classroom learning with real-life applications and enhances their readiness for future careers. **4. Integration of 21st-Century Skills** - NEP 2020 emphasizes the integration of 21st-century skills into the curriculum to prepare students for the demands of a rapidly changing world. These skills include: Critical thinking and problem-solving, Creativity and innovation,

Communication and collaboration, Digital literacy and technological skills. The policy ensures that these competencies are embedded across subjects rather than taught in isolation. This integration enables learners to adapt to complex situations, think independently, and contribute effectively to society (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). **5. Multidisciplinary Approach** - Another key provision of NEP 2020 is the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach to education. It breaks down rigid boundaries between subjects such as science, arts, and commerce, allowing students to choose diverse combinations based on their interests. The multidisciplinary approach: Encourages holistic and flexible learning, Promotes creativity and innovation through cross-disciplinary exposure, Helps learners develop a broader perspective and diverse skill sets. For example, a student can study mathematics along with music or vocational subjects, which enhances both cognitive and creative abilities. This approach aligns with global education trends and supports the development of well-rounded individuals. These provisions highlight that skill development is not treated as an additional component but as an integral part of the education system under NEP 2020. By incorporating vocational education, experiential learning, internships, 21st-century skills, and multidisciplinary learning, the policy aims to create a generation of learners who are not only knowledgeable but also skilled, adaptable, and future-ready.

Role of Skill Development in Holistic Education

The National Education Policy 2020 recognizes skill development as a fundamental component in achieving holistic education. Holistic education aims at the all-round development of learners, encompassing intellectual, emotional, social, and personal growth. Skill development plays a crucial role in nurturing these dimensions by equipping students with competencies necessary for life, learning, and work.

1. Enhancing Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving

Skill development fosters critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, which are essential for intellectual growth. Through inquiry-based learning, project work, and real-life problem-solving tasks, students learn to analyze situations, evaluate alternatives, and make informed decisions.

These skills: Enable learners to think logically and independently, Encourage questioning and exploration, Help in addressing real-world challenges effectively. NEP 2020 emphasizes competency-based education, where learners are not passive recipients of information but active participants in constructing knowledge (Ministry of Education, 2020). This shift significantly contributes to cognitive development.

2. Promoting Creativity and Innovation

Skill-based education encourages creativity and innovation by providing opportunities for learners to explore new ideas and express themselves freely. Activities such as art, design thinking, project-based learning, and interdisciplinary tasks stimulate imagination and originality. Creativity development: Enhances the ability to generate new ideas, Encourages innovative thinking and experimentation, Supports adaptability in changing environments. By integrating creative practices into the curriculum, NEP 2020 aims to nurture innovators and problem-solvers who can contribute to societal and economic progress (Robinson, 2011).

3. Developing Communication and Collaboration Skills

Effective communication and collaboration are key components of holistic education. Skill development initiatives focus on group activities, discussions, presentations, and teamwork, which help learners interact effectively with others. These skills: Improve verbal and non-verbal communication, Foster teamwork and cooperation, Build leadership and interpersonal relationships. Such competencies are

essential not only for academic success but also for professional and social life. NEP 2020 promotes collaborative learning environments that prepare students for diverse and multicultural settings (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

4. Building Self-Reliance and Confidence

Skill development contributes significantly to building self-reliance and confidence among learners. When students acquire practical skills and apply them successfully, they develop a sense of achievement and independence. This leads to: Increased self-confidence and motivation, Ability to take initiative and responsibility, Development of entrepreneurial mindset. Vocational education, internships, and hands-on learning experiences, as emphasized in NEP 2020, empower students to become self-sufficient and career-ready. This aligns with the broader vision of developing an “Atmanirbhar Bharat” (self-reliant India).

5. Emotional and Social Development

Skill development also plays a vital role in enhancing **emotional and social competencies**, which are essential for holistic development. Through activities such as group work, role-playing, and community engagement, students learn empathy, cooperation, and emotional regulation. These aspects: Strengthen emotional intelligence and self-awareness, Promote empathy and respect for others, Encourage responsible citizenship and ethical behavior. Holistic education under NEP 2020 integrates these social-emotional skills into the learning process, ensuring that learners grow into balanced and socially responsible individuals (UNESCO, 2015).

In summary, skill development is a powerful tool for achieving holistic education. It not only enhances cognitive abilities such as critical thinking and creativity but also supports social, emotional, and personal growth. By integrating skill-based learning into the education system, NEP 2020 aims to develop well-rounded individuals who are capable, confident, and prepared to face the challenges of the modern world.

Challenges in Implementation

While the National Education Policy 2020 presents a progressive vision for integrating skill development into holistic education, its effective implementation faces several structural and practical challenges. These barriers need careful consideration to ensure the successful realization of policy goals.

1. Lack of Trained Teachers

One of the most significant challenges is the shortage of adequately trained teachers who can effectively deliver skill-based and experiential learning. Traditional teacher training programs have largely focused on content delivery rather than competency-based pedagogy.

As a result: Teachers may lack understanding of experiential and project-based methods, Limited capacity to integrate vocational and life skills into teaching, Resistance to adopting innovative teaching practices. Continuous professional development and capacity-building programs are essential to equip teachers with the required pedagogical and technical skills (Ministry of Education, 2020).

2. Infrastructure Limitations

Effective implementation of skill development requires proper infrastructure and resources, which are often lacking, especially in government and rural schools.

Key issues include: Absence of laboratories, workshops, and digital tools, Limited access to internet and ICT facilities, Inadequate space for practical and vocational activities. Without sufficient infrastructure, it becomes difficult to conduct hands-on learning, internships, and skill-based training, thereby limiting the impact of NEP 2020 reforms.

3. Curriculum Rigidity

Although NEP 2020 advocates flexibility, in practice, many schools still follow rigid and exam-oriented curricula. The pressure to complete the syllabus and focus on board examinations restricts the integration of skill-based activities.

This results in: Limited time for experiential and project-based learning, Continued emphasis on theoretical knowledge, Difficulty in implementing interdisciplinary approaches. Curriculum restructuring and flexibility at the institutional level are necessary to incorporate skill development meaningfully.

4. Assessment Issues

The existing assessment system remains largely focused on rote memorization and written examinations. This creates a mismatch between teaching methods and evaluation practices.

Challenges include: Lack of tools to assess practical skills and competencies, Overemphasis on marks rather than learning outcomes, Insufficient use of formative and continuous assessment. To support skill-based education, assessment methods must be reformed to evaluate critical thinking, creativity, and application of knowledge (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

5. Rural-Urban Disparities

A major barrier to the uniform implementation of NEP 2020 is the gap between rural and urban education systems. In rural areas: Limited access to quality education and skilled teachers, Poor infrastructure and lack of digital connectivity, Fewer opportunities for internships and vocational exposure. In contrast, urban schools often have better facilities and resources, leading to unequal learning opportunities. Addressing this disparity is crucial to ensure inclusive and equitable education for all learners.

These challenges highlight the gap between policy vision and ground-level implementation. Addressing issues such as teacher training, infrastructure development, curriculum flexibility, assessment reforms, and regional disparities is essential for the successful integration of skill development into holistic education. A coordinated effort from policymakers, educators, and institutions is required to overcome these barriers and realize the full potential of NEP 2020.

Recommendations

To effectively realize the vision of skill development for holistic education as envisaged in the National Education Policy 2020, it is essential to address existing challenges through strategic and well-planned interventions. The following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthening Teacher Training Programs

Teachers play a central role in implementing skill-based and holistic education. Therefore, continuous professional development (CPD) programs should be designed to equip teachers with modern pedagogical skills. Key measures include: Training in experiential, competency-based, and project-based learning methods, Capacity building in integrating vocational and life skills into classroom teaching, Exposure to digital tools and innovative teaching practices, Regular workshops, refresher courses, and mentoring support. Well-trained teachers can effectively facilitate active learning environments and foster skill development among students.

2. Curriculum Redesign and Flexibility

There is a need to redesign the curriculum to make it more flexible, multidisciplinary, and skill-oriented. The curriculum should move beyond content-heavy structures and focus on learning outcomes and competencies. Suggested actions: Integrate vocational, life, and 21st-century skills across subjects, Provide flexibility in subject choices and learning pathways, Reduce syllabus load to allow time for

experiential learning, Promote interdisciplinary and project-based activities. A restructured curriculum will support the holistic development of learners and align with the objectives of NEP 2020.

3. Integration of Technology in Education

The effective use of technology can significantly enhance skill development and learning outcomes. Schools should adopt digital tools and platforms to support interactive and personalized learning. Recommendations include: Use of smart classrooms, e-learning platforms, and digital content, Promoting digital literacy among students and teachers, Encouraging blended learning approaches (online + offline), Utilizing virtual labs and simulations for practical learning. Technology integration can bridge learning gaps, especially in remote areas, and make education more accessible and engaging.

4. Strengthening School–Industry Collaboration

To make skill development relevant and practical, there should be strong collaboration between educational institutions and industries. Key initiatives: Organizing internships, apprenticeships, and field visits, Involving industry experts in curriculum design and teaching, Establishing skill development centers in collaboration with local industries, Providing career guidance and vocational exposure to students. Such partnerships will help students gain real-world experience and enhance their employability.

5. Policy Support and Continuous Monitoring

Effective implementation of NEP 2020 requires strong policy support and monitoring mechanisms at all levels. Important steps: Allocation of adequate funding and resources for skill development initiatives, Establishment of monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress, Regular feedback from stakeholders (teachers, students, parents), Ensuring accountability and transparency in implementation. Continuous monitoring and policy support will ensure that the objectives of skill development and holistic education are achieved effectively.

These recommendations highlight the need for a systemic and collaborative approach to successfully implement skill development initiatives under NEP 2020. By focusing on teacher empowerment, curriculum reform, technological integration, industry collaboration, and policy support, the education system can move closer to achieving holistic and skill-oriented learning outcomes.

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